

Council on Postsecondary Education
September 21, 2003

Creating a Seamless System:
Focus on Transfer

Student transfer, especially from two- to four-year colleges, is a vital part of Kentucky's effort to build a seamless postsecondary system and increase the number of Kentuckians holding a baccalaureate degree. A number of Council initiatives are focused on improving transfer. The Council of Chief Academic Officers addressed transfer issues at a special July 2003 retreat and transfer was a focus of the September 2003 SCOPE meeting. This agenda item updates the Council on the current state of transfer and efforts to improve the number and success of transfer students.

Educational reform has produced dramatic increases in Kentucky's community and technical college enrollment. More Kentuckians are receiving workforce training, more high school students are enrolled in dual credit college courses, and more students are enrolled in applied degrees leading most directly to better jobs. However, in 2002, only 15,579 students were enrolled in degree programs specifically designed to transfer to four-year institutions (Associate in Arts and Associate in Science Degrees), representing 20 percent of the total two-year enrollment. Furthermore, in 2002, 10,296 students were undecided about their degree; 17,237 were enrolled in applied degrees; and the remaining 32,970 were enrolled in certificate programs, workforce development courses, and high school dual enrollment options. The challenge is not only to increase the percentage of students transferring from AA and AS degrees but also to motivate more undecided students to plan their academic programs for transfer and provide routes to transfer for those in applied degrees.

Why Transfer Is Important

The two- to four- year transfer has become increasingly important, as both our educational and economic systems have undergone fundamental changes in recent years. The economic advantages of higher education and especially a baccalaureate degree for Kentuckians are illustrated in recent data showing differences in median earnings and unemployment rates by degree attainment. In 2000, the unemployment rate for individuals with a high school degree was 5.7 percent, with median earnings of \$24,656 per year. These figures improve with the associate degree (2.9 percent unemployment and median earnings of

\$33,434), and are significantly better for bachelor's degree earners with an unemployment rate of 2.0 percent and median earnings of \$50,145. Improving transfer also promotes enrollment in our community and technical colleges. They are the most economical means for providing the first two years of college for Kentucky students.

The Current State of Transfer

The Council on Postsecondary Education supports several transfer initiatives that began in the mid-1990s after the passing of related legislation. The initiatives—aimed at students completing AA and AS degrees—guarantees the transfer of 60 credit hours and assures the transfer of all or part of general education course requirements from one institution to another.

In addition, the Council supports programs to improve transfer for the growing number of students in applied degree programs. The Council and institutions recently implemented a policy ensuring that all general education credits in these programs transfer (though most applied degrees have only 12-15 hours of general education). In addition, over 30 2+2 transfer frameworks have been created for specific applied associate degrees. These 2+2 transfer frameworks maximize transfer of credits, including many technical courses, to related four-year degree programs. Finally, every university has committed to creating a “completer” degree. The completer degree accepts all coursework from any associate degree program and then provides a special upper division program leading to the baccalaureate degree. For example, Northern Kentucky University's completer program in organizational leadership overlays advanced coursework in management and leadership on any applied associate degree to prepare students for supervisory positions in their area of work.

In the past year, Kentucky has increased the total number of students transferring from two- to four-year public institutions from 2,732 to 2,877. In addition, some students transfer to out-of-state universities. The Council is working to better identify those students.

While Kentucky is reaching its current goal for transfer, the percentage of students that continue to a four-year university within six years remains below the national transfer rate. The Council staff will work with institutions in the coming year to increase their goals for transfer and develop strategies to meet more aggressive goals.

The good news is that students that transfer to universities are being retained and are graduating at slightly better levels than their native counterparts with about the same number of credits. The 2000 retention rate of transfer students in Kentucky was 72.4 percent compared to the rate for native students of 69.9

percent. The graduation rate of transfer students in 2002 was 51.9 percent, higher than that of native students at 45.5 percent. Overall, transfer students graduated with slightly more credit hours than native students (146 credits and 139 credits, respectively), suggesting that most credits from two-year colleges are transferring.

While these performance numbers are positive, the Council staff is requesting data from institutions that will allow more detailed analysis of the performance of transfer students. The data will allow creation of a Community College Feedback Report modeled after the current High School Feedback Report. The report will show how students from individual community and technical colleges in particular programs at those colleges performed at each four-year university. It will provide valuable feedback supporting better alignment of requirements between two-year and four-year academic programs and improving the academic success of transfer students.

Why Aren't More Students Transferring and What Can We Do About It?

The Council and institutions are focusing on three problems that currently reduce the number of students successfully transferring from two- to four-year institutions.

Challenge One: Transfer agreements are underused.

Despite the great effort that has gone into creating the transfer frameworks that ensure full transfer of all general education credit and lower division courses in majors for those in transfer degrees, data show that few students in those programs are using these tools. In 2002, only 320 students transferred into a university with a certification of transfer documented on their transcript.

Solutions. The Council of Chief Academic Officers met in July to discuss increasing the utility of Kentucky's transfer tools. From this discussion, several decisions were made that will increase student use of transfer tools. These include the development of more flexible, student-oriented transfer frameworks and a more standardized process for certifying and accepting transfer student coursework.

In addition, all institutions agreed to implement an online transfer system by spring 2004. Using this system, students will be able to better plan their academic programs to align with statewide transfer agreements, guaranteeing successful transfer at any stage in their academic careers. The online system immediately translates students' courses into the appropriate transfer framework and provides immediate feedback on the transferability of

completed coursework or even courses the student is planning to take. The Council recommends and supports the use of the Course Applicability System to provide online support for transfer.

The KYVU also currently offers a highly successful online associate transfer degree and is increasing the number of applied associate degrees online. In addition to increasing access, these online programs ensure maximum transfer of credits using the various transfer frameworks.

Finally, the Council is planning regional workshops promoting transfer and training students and faculty to use CAS. The workshops, along with student transfer information that will be available on the new Go Higher Kentucky Web portal in spring 2004, will help to increase awareness of the statewide transfer tools and the number of successful transfers.

Challenge Two: Most students are not in programs designed for transfer. Over 17,000 students enrolled in the KCTCS and Lexington Community College are in applied programs (AAS degrees) not originally designed for transfer.

Solutions. To address the changing community college population, the Council will continue to support the development of statewide 2+2 agreements targeted toward students enrolled in applied degrees. Each 2+2 agreement defines the coursework from a particular AAS degree that will transfer into a related baccalaureate program. For example, the KCTCS and the public and independent colleges are nearing completion of a 2+2 agreement for the AAS in Education—Teacher Preparation that allows students completing the AAS to transfer coursework to a four-year teacher preparation program. Students in AAS degree programs also will be able to use CAS to identify how their coursework will transfer to a four-year program.

Completer degree programs being developed at all public universities also will ensure full transfer of credits from AAS degrees for those students who find these degrees appropriate to their career goals.

Challenge Three: Increasing numbers of students understand they need college but they are initially focused on occupational goals. While over 15,500 students at community colleges are enrolled in transfer degrees (AA and AS), just 20 percent continue their education by transferring to a four-year institution. Another 10,296 are undecided about their degree program, and 17,237 are in applied degree programs, suggesting they are focused more on employment than transfer.

Solutions. For many two-year college students immediate employment is an appropriate goal. However, many more should be considering transfer and a baccalaureate degree. As part of the GoHigherKy communication campaign, the Council developed publications promoting the economic advantages of transfer. These materials will be used in regional workshops with KCTCS and LCC faculty and students to encourage students to consider transfer options and better understand the transfer programs available to them. The transfer campaign will target students in transfer degrees, undecided students, and students in applied degrees who can use 2+2 transfer frameworks and completer degrees.

Unfortunately, because funds for the overall GoHigherKy campaign were cut from the Council's budget this year, the plans for the campaign to motivate transfer have been scaled back dramatically.

Conclusion

Postsecondary education reform has produced dramatic increases in postsecondary enrollment but that alone is not enough. Student transfer, especially from two- to four-year colleges, is vital to reaching Kentucky's goal of achieving the national average of baccalaureate degree holders by 2015 and building a seamless system of postsecondary education. The success of the KCTCS and LCC in enrolling large numbers of students to address workforce demands in certificate, applied degree, and workforce programs has created a more complex context for transfer that offers both a greater challenge and an opportunity to enroll more students in bachelor degree programs. To meet the challenge, the Council and institutions are developing a broad array of new transfer tools, increasing transfer goals, and creating new motivational programs.